

To the Editor:

In an editorial dated October 4, 2013, entitled "County has room for 'comp' bed tax" the Plain Dealer editorial board took it upon itself to castigate members of the Cuyahoga County Council Finance Committee. The reason for this castigation and allegations of "partisan and personal politics" was that members of the Council Committee engaged in an open and public debate in a public meeting of the Finance Committee regarding the pros and cons of adding a tax on complementary hotel rooms.

After a very thin presentation on the merits of the new tax by the administration's interim fiscal officer, members of the Committee, including myself, raised questions as to whether "the fox is worth the chase." In other words, would the additional tax have a chilling effect on convention business? Would the value of the tax income earned outweigh the value of the economic impact and overall good earned when visitors who stay in comped rooms visit restaurants, area attractions and spend money in the local economy?

While the Plain Dealer rightfully points out that Rock Ohio Caesars, the consortium behind the Horseshoe Casino Cleveland has no opposition to the tax, at least twelve representatives from other hotel groups - a point that the editorial board neglected to mention - appeared before the committee speaking in opposition to the legislation. These seasoned members of the hotel and convention industry made extremely cogent arguments as to the negative impact of this tax.

Members of Council are acutely aware that Cleveland is in a very competitive market for convention business. We are also aware that Cleveland has one of the highest bed taxes in the nation, which was recently increased by the City of Cleveland's adoption of an ordinance that requires the payment of the city bed tax on comped rooms - a measure that passed with little or no discussion.

No decision was made as to whether or not to adopt the legislation that would impose the additional county tax. Council asked for more information from the administration as to the true financial impact of the tax. Those opposed offered to supply Council with ordinances and practices in other cities and counties within the State of Ohio and across the nation. Council would also welcome input from the public.

In a democratic government we have a system of checks and balances. The executive branch proposes a tax increase and the legislative branch must approve or reject it after proper deliberation and consideration. While the unelected members of the Plain Dealer editorial board may feel that the tax is not onerous, there is another side to the issue. Good government mandates room for open and honest debate on the merits and demerits of an issue before a final decision is made - something the editorial board clearly overlooks.

C. Ellen Connally, President - Cuyahoga County Council
October 7, 2013